

United States Information Service

OFFICIAL TEXT

60, Khayaban-e-Quaide-Azam, Blue Area, F-6/4 Islamabad. Tel: 824051

U.S. TASK FORCE FOCUSES ON NARCOTICS IN SOUTHWEST ASIA

Washington -- A U.S. State Department official said last week that "although Southwest Asia continues to supply approximately half of the heroin consumed in the United States (1984 DEA -- Drug Enforcement Administration -- estimate), opium poppy production and even cannabis and hashish production in Southwest Asia are heavily influenced by consumption within that region and the Middle East."

Acting assistant secretary Ann Wroblewski of the Bureau of International Narcotics Matters focused her public comments on Pakistan where she noted optimistically that temporary problems will be overcome. She stressed that Pakistani Prime Minister Junejo and the U.S. share the same mutual goals on narcotics control.

Her prepared testimony focussed on the positive legal changes which have been made in India regarding illicit narcotics and addressed concerns with respect to Afghanistan, Iran, Nepal and Turkey. Her statement follows:

(Begin Text)

Mr. Chairman:

The Department of State is offering testimony this afternoon concerning the narcotics production, trafficking and control situations in Southwest Asia, focusing upon Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, Iran, Nepal and Turkey.

There are four basic inter-related points we want to establish in this hearing, including new concerns about expanded opium production in the region and the capability of governments in the region to contain this expansion.

The first and most fundamental point to make about the narcotics situation in Southwest Asia is that, although Southwest Asia continues to supply approximately half of the heroin consumed in the United States (1984 DEA estimate), opium poppy production and even cannabis and hashish production in Southwest Asia are heavily influenced by consumption within that region and the Middle East. In this respect, the situation is not unlike that in Southeast Asia, but is markedly different from that in Latin America, where much of the illicit narcotics production is specifically targeted for the United States market.

The second point is that the production dynamic changed dramatically in the 1985-86 crop season, especially in

Pakistan, where we estimate that the 1985-86 opium crop increased to a range of 100-150 metric tons, compared to an estimate of 40-70 metric tons in 1985. We believe much of the increase in Pakistani opium production was a result of three factors -- increasing prices for raw opium which led to cultivation of additional acreage, highly favorable weather conditions which sharply increased yield, and accelerating demand within the region for opium and heroin. While there is some possibility that the estimated increase in Pakistani opium production in 1986 could result in increased exports of opium products to the United States and Europe, the available information indicates that the increased production is being absorbed within the region. Moreover, there was a change in the political system which resulted inadvertently in a period of governmental inaction.

The third point is that, the higher levels of production needed to respond to this increasing indigenous demand increase the threat of expanded heroin exports to the United States. This heightens our concerns about the effectiveness of control and demand reduction programs within the region.

We are especially concerned about shortcomings in the Pakistani narcotics enforcement program. Moreover, we are concerned about shifts in the trade routes and trafficking practices of the myriad drug cartels and organizations which ply this trade, especially the shifts through India and also through the Middle East, notably Lebanon.

But, the fourth point we want to make is that the recent unsatisfactory enforcement of the opium poppy ban in Gadoon area of Pakistan does not represent a lasting breakdown in U.S.-Pakistani cooperation on eradication and control of narcotics trafficking. The top leadership of the government remains firm in its resolve to combat the drug problem, there has been progress on enforcement, and recent discussions at high levels of both governments persuades us that the problems encountered recently are temporary and will be overcome.

With that statement as background, let me proceed with a discussion of individual countries, beginning with Pakistan.

Pakistan

The narcotics situation in Pakistan has changed several times in the last decade. We are all familiar with the dramatic change in the late Seventies, when Pakistan emerged from a country which largely produced opium for its internal consumption to a major factor on the international market. In 1979, an estimated 800 metric tons of opium were produced, and the amounts intended for the international market were largely refined in Turkey, Sicily and elsewhere for the U.S. and European heroin markets. In the early Eighties, the dynamic changed again, and heroin laboratories emerged in Pakistan, and are a principal factor in the subsequent outbreak of heroin addiction in Pakistan.

In recent years, opium production in Pakistan had sharply declined, and the country's prominence in international narcotics was that of a principal refiner of Southwest Asian

opium into heroin and the principal conduit for Southwest Asian heroin intended for the U.S. and European markets.

Those roles continue, but, now, Pakistan has re-emerged, at least in the 1985-86 season, as a major opium producer.

A number of factors converged to create the changed production situation in Pakistan. The best information available to us suggests that opium production yield would have increased from 70 to 100 metric tons in 1986, because of abundant rainfall. Increased planting in response to higher prices for opium gum is estimated to have led to an expansion in the number of hectares under cultivation, with a further push upward on yield to as much as 150 metric tons.

In considering the continuing viability of the U.S. and U.N. assisted programs, it is important to note that the ban continued to be effectively enforced during the 1985-86 growing season in the Malakand, Buner and Dir/Aqinzai areas, where attempts were made to recultivate opium poppy and the crops were destroyed. As noted above, much of the expansion took place in the Gadoon, Dir and tribal areas, the latter not covered by development agreements. In Gadoon, or Gadoon/Amazai, there had been progress in response to development assistance provided by USAID through the 1984 and 1985 seasons. When enforcement was attempted in March of this year under the new civil government, physical opposition was encountered and in the subsequent encounter, 13 people were killed, numerous injuries were sustained, and over 100 persons were arrested. The authorities eliminated about 500 to 600 acres of opium poppy of the targetted 2,500 to 2,900 acres.

Pakistani authorities concede that the crop should have been eliminated in all targetted areas in late December or January, and that the delays in enforcement, which took place when the crop was mature and ready for harvest, compounded the situation which resulted in the shooting incidents. At the same time, Pakistani officials acknowledge that, at the time when action should have been taken, Pakistan was undergoing a change from martial law to civilian government, and, the enforcement effort slackened during this transition.

Senior Pakistani officials, beginning with President Zia and Prime Minister Junejo, have been adamant in insisting that enforcement of the ban on opium production will be pursued with vigor during the fall and winter months of 1986, when the next crop will be cultivated. They will pursue the prior procedure, under which there is first a warning, followed up by eradication of the crop where necessary in early stages of growth, and finally eradication if needed of any crops in latter stages of growth that may have escaped early detection. It must be noted that, as in the past, enforcement of the ban is directly linked to development assistance by the United States and United Nations. Much of the 1985-86 season increase in opium cultivation took place in Gadoon, Dir and the tribal areas; the Dir and tribal areas are not yet covered by an enforcement agreement because development projects for those areas have not yet begun. Moreover, as indicated above, the increased price for a kilogram of opium, which jumped to 2,500 rupees, also stimulated increased planting.

While there was serious slippage this year in Pakistan's eradication program, eradication, particularly in Gadoon, the overall GOP record since 1979 remains impressive. The enforcement program, begun in 1983, has made steady progress. In 1985, for example, more than 6 metric tons of heroin were seized, as well as 55 metric tons of hashish. DEA estimates that procedures implemented by Pakistani Customs at airports have resulted in a decrease in quantities of heroin shipped by air. A total of 90 heroin laboratories have been seized, including 29 in the past year.

Much remains to be done, however, on both the eradication and enforcement fronts. Availability of drugs has not been reduced, and investigations against major traffickers are inadequate. Treatment and prevention programs are embryonic. Public awareness or both trafficking and drug abuse related problems needs to be stimulated. More data are needed on causes and patterns of addiction. We will encourage action on all these fronts, and also encourage increased regional cooperation, bilaterally as well as cooperation through the South Asian Association For Regional Cooperation.

But, the new leadership under Prime Minister Junejo has demonstrated its commitment to our mutual goals. Over the past four months, the various narcotics issues have been fully discussed in meetings with the President, Prime Minister, the Minister of Interior and others, meetings that have involved Attorney General Meese, Under Secretary Armacost, former Assistant Secretary Thomas and myself, as well as the Ambassador who continues to apply strong leadership in constant dialogue with the Government. We believe a strong, serious cooperative relationship exists with respect to the narcotics issue. We intend to build on that relationship by cooperating with the Government of Pakistan in reviewing what went wrong in late 1985, and setting enforcement objectives well in advance of the 1986-87 growing season.

Afghanistan and Iran

The National Narcotics Intelligence Consumers Committee's Subcommittee on Production, which generates the data used in our annual report, estimated 1985 opium production in Afghanistan in a range of 300-400 metric tons, and Iran in a range of 200-400 metric tons. Preliminary estimates for 1986 suggest that both ranges remain viable, with Afghan production possibly in the lower end of that range and Iranian production in the middle of the range.

These countries present special problems in our global narcotics strategy because they are inaccessible politically and, despite protestations from their governments, do not control illicit opium production.

Afghan opium continues to be refined on both sides of the border with Pakistan, and to be routed through Pakistan for internal consumption and export to other countries in the region as well as to the West. The indication is that the number of heroin laboratories in eastern Afghanistan is increasing. There are ample indications of a problem of consumption of opium products among Soviet military personnel, but no reliable data.

There is evidence that, while Iran has a huge heroin addict population, and could be a net importer of opium from Afghanistan and Pakistan, some Iran opium production nevertheless is exported from its northwestern areas for consumption on the international market. Opiates produced in Afghanistan are also transhipped through Iran to the West.

India

Located between the Golden Triangle and the Golden Crescent, India has emerged in recent years as a major transit country for illicit narcotics. Smugglers ship opium products through India both from Burma in the Golden Triangle and Pakistan in the Golden Crescent. Precursor chemicals manufactured in India are shipped into southeast Asia through Burma. According to the Indian press, India's role as a drug trafficking center has resulted in a significant increase in its addict population, which was one factor in prompting the Government of India to toughen its existing narcotics control laws last year. Principal changes in those laws included increased penalties for possession, sale and manufacture of narcotic drugs, and new controls on shipment of precursor chemicals. Arrests have increased as a result of the new legislation.

The U.S. and India have engaged in active discussions regarding its growth as a drug trafficking center and, in January 1986, established a Joint Narcotics Working Group as a mechanism to facilitate cooperation on narcotics matters. The Attorney General participated in comprehensive discussions with the Indian government during his March visit to New Delhi.

India is the world's largest producer of licit opium. We have indicated to the Indians our concern that its stockpile of licit opium is and will continue to be a target for diversion into licit channels, particularly in view of increased demand for opium products throughout Southwest Asia. By some estimates, as much as 20 to 30 percent of India's licit opium production, which has not been closely controlled in the past, is being diverted into the illicit market.

India's ability to check illicit drug traffic across its borders and domestically will depend on its ability to strengthen enforcement. To this end the Government of India is preparing to establish a Narcotics Control Board. Last December the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation agreed to include narcotics cooperation among the group's major cooperative objectives. Ultimately, given India's position as a transit country and major consumer of illicit narcotics, its success in controlling narcotics will depend in part on the effectiveness of regional cooperative efforts, and in part on its internal control mechanisms.

Nepal

A relatively new trouble spot, Nepal in recent years has become a transit point for international heroin trafficking, as well as a money-laundering site. There is now evidence of a serious domestic heroin consumption problem. These activities are having profound social and economic effects, and have prompted the government to seek U.S. assistance on training narcotics enforcement personnel. Government recognition of the problem

has led to these requests for assistance, to Nepal hosting a major international conference last September of non-governmental organizations concerned about drug abuse, and hosting a conference this fall of senior narcotics coordinators from U.S. embassies in Southwest Asia.

Turkey

The situation remains unchanged since our report in February. The Government continues its effective suppression of illicit opium cultivation, but heroin laboratories continue to operate in the underdeveloped Eastern provinces, and Turkey continues to serve as a landbridge for opium products from Southwest Asia entering Europe to satisfy that market and for onward shipment to the United States. Cooperation with Turkish authorities remains good, and U.S. officials are discussing revised strategies for dealing with the "eastern" problem.

Middle East

Like Eastern Turkey, Lebanon and Syria have become not only conduits for heroin transversing Asia to Europe and the United States, but sites for heroin conversion labs as well. Lebanon continues to be a major source of hashish, especially for export to Egypt, but Lebanese opium poppy is believed to be only marginally cultivated and reportedly has a low morphine content and is therefore not attractive to heroin producers.

There are indications of increasing trafficking in drugs throughout the Middle East, both for consumption in Arab states and for onward smuggling. Kurdish and Armenian traffickers with transborder ties in Turkey and Iran are apparently linked to the increased trafficking through Syria. The unstable situation in Lebanon and the fact that the northern Bekaa Valley is controlled by Syrian military forces reportedly contribute to transborder trafficking in the region.

Cocaine and cocaine base are now entering Lebanon from Colombia, Bolivia, Peru and Brazil for conversion and forward shipment; there are reports of cocaine processing in Syria.

Cooperation among these countries and among law enforcement agencies within their respective governments on narcotics control is considered poor.

(End Text)
